

MEMORANDUM FOR: Messrs. ~~Proctor/Walsh~~

Attached is Ambassador Durbrow's optimistic view of the South Vietnamese situation and his debunking of the "political prisoners" charge.

I will send copies to OCI, OER, and OPR.

Done
Copies to

(File: Director)

Done mod

11 February 1974
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF VISIT TO VIETNAM

1. The most striking impression one had was the firm cautious optimism expressed by all Vietnamese we talked with that despite the severe handicaps imposed on South Vietnam by the Jan. 27, 1973 Paris Cease-fire Agreements, they were determined to carry on the struggle against a communist take over.

2. This firm determination was predicated on the assumption that U.S. military and economic aid will continue at approximately the 1974 fiscal year level. Without that aid level most Vietnamese felt they could not carry on the fight against the increasingly strong North Vietnamese forces that continue to move south over the new road system Hanoi's forces have built. The enemy forces must be kept off balance with continued harrassing operations.

3. The military showed realistic appraisals of the job ahead, a determination to be prepared for all contingencies by training, continued patrolling and planning. The officers we saw expressed the opinion that now that the ARVN forces are on their own, they are better troops than when U.S. forces were fighting with them. The GVN does not expect a general offensive, but strong local disrupting probes.

4. The general opinion of those dealing with the economy was that with continued economic aid at F.Y. '74 levels, South Vietnam is economically self-sufficient in about five

years provided they had relative peace and no all-out disruptive offensive to again throw things off balance. This optimistic hope was also predicated on the assumption that sufficient supplies of fertilizer would be available for the cultivation of more "miracle" rice and on the assumption that the coming off-shore oil explorations would be successful in finding oil in fair quantities.

5. Corruption of course exists, all admitted it, but the government is trying to curb it as much as possible through fiscal reforms and tighter controls.

6. The general impression of the throngs in the city streets and in the countryside is one of basic content. The land reform system is much sounder than that put in effect by President Diem, because the land is given outright to those who have tilled the land and the government pays off the former owner over a period of years using basically P.L. 480 aid funds for this purpose.

7. It is most noteworthy that despite cries of the "Thieu dictatorship" he had distributed over 550,000 arms to the Peoples Self-Defense Forces, the village militia at the grass roots level, has distributed over 300,000 weapons, M-16's and grenade launchers to the Regional forces (a sort of Province National Guard who are expected to defend their local province) as well as over 242,000 similar weapons to the Popular Forces

-3-

(local forces assigned the duty to defend their local region). Thus all told to forces, other than the regular national military forces of well over one million men, Thieu has distributed over one million arms to his "home town boys" to defend themselves against the Hanoi invaders.

8. We found no firm evidence of excessive repressive political actions. Of course there are some persons under arrest who could be classified as "political prisoners" but this is quite normal in a country that has been infiltrated for years by well-trained communist political agitators and other cadre. Against this type of operation for a country still at war it is essential that all suspects be at least picked up and questioned if not held longer if they can't give a good account of themselves. Under the circumstances it is good preventive medicine to develop, train, and use a central national police force. South Vietnam is a very small country smaller than most American states, all of whom have some kind of a state police force, so it's logical and useful to have the same thing in Vietnam. With the ease of infiltration of trained communist operators who are identical in looks, dress, and basic language with the whole population, it is essential for survival to have a computerized central identification system, which American liberals are attacking as proof of Thieu's "police state."

9. The group visit to Con San Prison Island facility showed the stories of dungeon solitary confinement holes in the ground to be completely false.

10. A very thorough study conducted by the American Embassy in Saigon using all the facilities at its command including records of U.S. Police Advisors to the G.V.N. shows that it would be physically impossible to have over 200,000 "political prisoners" in South Vietnam. The Embassy estimates that even with severe overcrowding the lock-up jails and prisons could not house more than 40,000 civilian inmates of all kinds from murderers to bandits, robbers to misdemeanor type offenses.

Routing Slip

74-794

TO:

		ACTION	INFO.			ACTION	INFO.
1	DCI			11	IG		
2	DDCI			12	D/PPB		
3	DDS&T			13	SAVA		
4	DDI		✓	14	ASST/DCI		
5	DDO		✓	15	AO/DCI		
6	DDM&S			16	EX/SEC		
7	D/DCI/IC			17			
8	D/ONE		✓	18			
9	GC			19			
10	LC			20			

SUSPENSE

Date

Remarks:

Amb Ellbridge Durbrow
(ret) just made a trip to
Vietnam & under the Vietnamese
Council of Foreign Relations
auspices - These are
his conclusions which
he gave me privately -
F.V.I. -



DCI/DDCI

2/11/74